

Why are there stars on some bills?

By Roger Boye

Today's column answers more questions about coins and paper money.

Q—Would you tell me why there's a star (rather than a letter) after the serial number on some bills I get in change?

R.J., Schaumburg

A—Your greenbacks were made as substitutes for misprinted bills that were destroyed during the production process. Instead, the government prints consecutively numbered "star notes" instead of printing new ones with identical numbers.

Q—I own a copper coin dated 1863 with the words "First in War—First in Peace" on one side and "Union Forever" on the other. What can you tell me about it?

R.B., Des Plaines

A—During the Civil War, thousands of businesses issued small tokens to make change because government coinage was hoarded for its metal content. In 1864, Congress outlawed such "private money."

A copper Civil War token with an advertising or patriotic slogan retails in the \$3 to \$30 range, depending on condition.